

AN  
**ADDRESS**

FROM THE

**PENNSYLVANIA SOCIETY**

FOR PROMOTING THE

**ABOLITION OF SLAVERY,**

FOR THE

**RELIEF OF FREE NEGROES UNLAWFULLY  
HELD IN BONDAGE,**

AND FOR IMPROVING

**THE CONDITION OF THE AFRICAN RACE;**

ON THE

*Origin, Purposes and Utility of their Institution.*

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**PHILADELPHIA:**

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THE Pennsylvania Society for promoting the abolition of slavery, for the relief of free negroes unlawfully held in bondage and for improving the condition of the African Race, has been impelled by urgent considerations to lay the following representation before the public.

The Society originated in a voluntary association, formed shortly after the passage of the Act of March 1st, 1780, for the gradual abolition of slavery. A law which, although it did not pursue the full development of natural rights set forth in our State constitution, has the merit of being the first legislative procedure in any nation, in favour of the unfortunate African, and of having laid a foundation on which Reason, Humanity and Justice have since raised some valuable superstructures.

Soon after this law was passed, it was perceived that its moderate and humane provisions would often be evaded—that the humble efforts of the unassisted black, to obtain the freedom to which he might be entitled, would too frequently fail and that the law would probably remain the empty ornament of our code, without yielding even the imperfect benefits it intended.

It is in all cases a duty on citizens to enforce the laws of their country. If a law is inexpedient it should be repealed, but while it retains the character, it ought to be accompanied by the powers of a national rule of action.

The Association, confining itself to this duty, had the satisfaction, as its principles became known, to find its numbers increase.

The Legislature approved the course it pursued, and in the year 1789 an act was passed to incorporate it by the title it now bears.

The venerable name of Franklin would not have been found in the list of its presidents, had not its principles possessed that tendency to public good which his superior mind enabled him so well to perceive and his benevolent heart always led him to promote.

With his name we unite those of James Pemberton, Benjamin Rush and Caspar Wistar, who successively occupied the same office, of all of whom it is barely justice to say that they would not have consented to fill a station inconsistent with the best interests of humanity.

The first object enumerated in the corporate title was to promote the abolition of slavery, to convince the slaveholder of the injustice of this unnatural species of property which seems now to be generally reprobated in the abstract, but which in some other states has become practically interwoven in their systems.

The climate and the soil, the moral, religious and political habits of Pennsylvania refute all pretence for the continuance of it among us. Public opinion slowly advancing has gradually reduced the number of our slaves and the co-operation of time will soon efface the stain entirely.

The second object was to procure the freedom of those who were unlawfully held in bondage. In this respect the efforts of the Society were expensive and laborious, and it is believed that no instance of unjust detention within the sphere of their powers came to their knowledge without being made a subject of their care. This is at present chiefly confined to the

endeavour to suppress the illegal and unjust attempts of a dishonourable class of men who sometimes violently seize, or under false pretences arrest by colour of law free persons resident among us, and who are often detected in carrying through our state those whom they have purchased or stolen elsewhere, for the purpose of sale in the southern parts of the Union.

The third object, the improvement of the condition of the African race is of extensive and increasing concern.

The descendants of those who were brought into our country by force, and compelled to constant labour, with little attention to the cultivation of their minds have a just claim upon us for instruction and assistance, to endeavour to render them more capable of encountering the difficulties of ignorance and poverty, and of becoming useful citizens.

One of the best modes of attaining this desirable object at present, seems to be to attend to the education of their children. For this purpose schools have been instituted and pains have been taken to induce the parents and friends to send their children to receive instruction.

But in relation to all these objects, and particularly the last, the Society finds itself limited and restrained by inadequacy of funds. Were its means equal to its wishes a general plan of competent education would be adopted, by which it would be in the power of every parent of the coloured race to give his child an opportunity of acquiring the art of reading, writing, and primary arithmetic.

With this preparation it is proposed that the young men should be placed out to mechanic and agricultural employments, and it is hoped that on such a foundation they would be found able to support themselves in a reputable and useful manner.

In pursuit of these three great objects many of the members of this Society have employed a great

portion of their time, and individually incurred considerable expence; they have frequently met with opposition from the interested, the unfeeling and the uninformed; their intentions have been misinterpreted, their efforts resisted, and their characters traduced. Yet they have persevered, and conscious of the integrity of their motives and the obligations of their charter, they mean to persevere in "promoting the abolition of slavery" wherever it is found practicable; in "relieving free negroes unlawfully held in bondage" wherever the fact comes within the sphere of their corporate powers and the law will afford relief, and in "improving the condition of the African race" by extending the means of instruction, promoting industry, encouraging those who are honest and laborious, and aiding when necessary in the punishment or coercion of those who are incorrigibly depraved.

This statement of our labors and our views, it is hoped will meet with the approbation of the community.

But the finances of our Society, originally slender, have been reduced by the necessity of constant disbursements. A call for pecuniary assistance is generally unwelcome, yet it is hoped that on those who may concur with us in thinking that the system we have pursued is eventually conducive to national benefit, the call will not be made in vain.

A committee appointed for the purpose will shortly wait on our fellow citizens, and those who are inclined, without further application, to transmit their donations to the Treasury, Thomas Shipley, will receive the thanks of the Society.

*By order of the Society,*

W. RAWLE, President:

Attest—B. WILLIAMS, Secretary.

*Philadelphia, April 29, 1819.*